



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



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North Africa, South Asia,
Commonwealth and the UN)**

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Dr Ruth Allen, Chief Executive
of the British Association of
Social Workers
John McGowan, General Secretary
of the Social Workers Union

*Dear Dr Ruth Allen and
Mr John McGowan,*

Thank you for your letter of 14 November to the Prime Minister including a statement from the British Association of Social Workers about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister of State for the Middle East.

A tragedy is unfolding in the Middle East. Israel has suffered the worst terror attack in its history and Palestinian civilians in Gaza are suffering a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis. The UK condemns the terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli and international citizens. Hamas is a terrorist organisation, which neither speaks for nor acts in the interests of the Palestinian people. There is no justification for the brutal targeting of civilians: terrorism will not prevail. As the Prime Minister has said, Hamas can have no future in the leadership of Gaza after their appalling terrorist attacks.

The UK supports Israel's right to defend itself in line with international humanitarian law. We have pressed Israel to ensure its campaign is targeted against Hamas leaders and military infrastructure; to allow aid to enter Gaza; to end settler violence; and to work with the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to improve the desperate humanitarian situation. It is vital that all parties ensure that their actions are

proportionate, necessary and minimise harm to civilians.

From the start we have said that we want British nationals to be able to leave Gaza, and for humanitarian aid to reach Gaza. We are therefore calling for a humanitarian pause to facilitate delivery of critical humanitarian aid and, crucially, to allow hostages and British nationals to leave. We are urgently exploring all diplomatic options and all practical routes, working with the UN and partners in the region and beyond. The UK does not support a ceasefire, which would only allow Hamas to entrench itself in Gaza and launch further attacks.

The UK is working intensively to get much greater amounts of aid into Gaza. We need a collective international effort to get aid in as fast as possible - including food, water, and fuel and medical supplies - by as many routes as possible. We welcome the agreement to allow some trucks of aid into Gaza through Rafah, but it is not enough. We urge Israel to open other border crossings.

The UK has committed to an additional £30 million of aid for Gaza, more than doubling our existing aid commitment for this year (£27 million). Three UK flights carrying a total of 51 tonnes of aid have landed in Egypt (on 25 October, 2 November and 3 November). These shipments have included lifesaving items such as wound care packs, water filters and solar powered lights, as well as vital equipment (including forklift trucks, belt conveyors and lighting towers) specifically requested by UK partners in the region to manage and deliver aid more effectively.

To prevent further conflict and terrorism, there must be a lasting political solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict: a two-state solution which provides peace, justice and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. The UK will work urgently with our partners to ensure this vision finally becomes a reality. We are also urging all sides to de-escalate tension in the West Bank and tackle all forms of extremism. We will oppose any attempts by malign actors to cause further escalation in the region.

As the Prime Minister has said, we are investing more deeply in regional stability and in the two-state solution. The Prime Minister, former Foreign Secretary and Ministers have spoken to counterparts across the region to underline the need to work together and avoid any further spread of conflict. This includes the King of Jordan, the President of Egypt, the Prime Minister of Israel, Palestinian Authority President Abbas, the President of Turkey, the Amir of Qatar, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, the UN Secretary General and the leaders of France, Canada, Italy, the USA and Germany. The former Foreign Secretary visited Israel on 11 October, Egypt on 19 October, attended a summit convened by President Sisi in Egypt on 21 October, visited the United Arab Emirates on 30 October and met seven Arab League Foreign Ministers in Riyadh on 9 November.

I spoke to the UN General Assembly in New York on Israel-Gaza Crisis and met representatives from the UN, Egypt, Jordan, UAE and the Palestinian Authority on 26/27 October. I have also reached out to our partners in the region, including with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Morocco, Bahrain and Lebanon. I visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 1-2 November.

In all our engagements with Israeli counterparts we have underscored the UK's firm belief in Israel's right to self-defence in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. Israel has a duty to minimise civilian casualties and we have called on Israel to take every possible precaution to avoid harming civilians. Humanity, rule of law, decency and the respect for human life is what sets us apart from the mindless violence of the terrorist.

The UK's position on international law is unwavering and we continue to make clear to

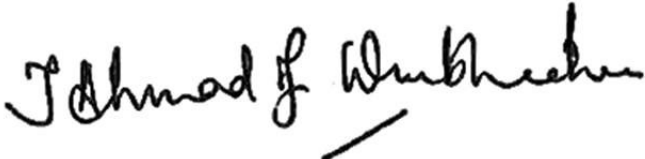
all parties that all possible measures must be taken to ensure civilian casualties are minimised and to facilitate humanitarian aid to the civilians in Gaza. The former Foreign Secretary emphasised these points during his recent visit to Israel. Israeli President Herzog has also said Israel will abide by international law.

We are also clear that peace, security and stability for Israelis and Palestinians alike can only be achieved through a collaborative and concerted effort towards a two-state solution; a secure Israel, living side by side with an independent, secure and viable Palestinian state.

This atrocity was a strike at the very heart of Israel. I understand why it has shaken the British Jewish community to its core. As the Prime Minister announced to Parliament on 16 October, the Government is providing an extra £3 million for the Community Security Trust to protect schools, synagogues, and other Jewish community buildings. We are working with the police to ensure that hate crime and the glorification of terror is met with the full force of the law. We stand with the British Jewish community.

We recognise that this is a moment of great anguish for British Muslim communities, who are also appalled by the terrorism of Hamas and the very desperate humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are working towards a robust humanitarian response to the situation in Gaza and to bring the suffering of Palestinians to an end. We mourn the loss of every innocent life, including many children, of civilians of every faith and every nationality. We stand with the British Muslim community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict